CHAPTER 1

The Speech Communication Process
## Assignment Checklist

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Scenario 1: Overcoming Speech Anxiety

“Hey, Karyn, wait up! I need your help!”

“Sure, Darryl—what’s going on?”

“Well, I think you know that I was elected as the treasurer for my fraternity, right?”

“Yeah, congratulations. That means you have an unlimited supply of money now, right? Got a few bucks I can borrow?”

“I wish. I’m more of a glorified bookkeeper. But I need your help. I’m supposed to give a report in front of everyone in the fraternity—including a few alumni—on the money we’ve raised so far this semester. I’m petrified. I didn’t realize the treasurer would have to speak in public! That’ll teach me to run for office, huh?”

“What can I do to help you out?”

“Well, aren’t you taking a public speaking class this semester? Have you learned any tips to help me with my nervousness? I’m desperate, and I’ll take any help I can get at this stage.”

“Sure, there are a couple of things you can do. First, you have to realize that it’s normal to be nervous. You’d probably be surprised to find that even the people who don’t seem nervous have a little flutter inside when they speak. And usually people listening to you don’t even see it.”

“Really? I doubt that Todd, our chapter president, has ever been nervous in his entire life! That guy is unreal!”

“You’d be surprised how many people have stage fright. That’s the first helpful thing I can tell you; just about everyone feels some level of nervousness—even famous speakers! But if you can learn to channel that nervousness you feel, the jitters can work to your advantage. You’ll come across as excited and enthusiastic. That wouldn’t be such a bad thing, would it?”

“I guess not. I never thought about it that way. Being nervous is a good thing? You’re saying people won’t even realize I’m nervous? What else can I do?”

“Well, probably one of the biggest things you can do is to prepare. Make sure you do the work before you speak—spend some time thinking about what you want to say, do some research if necessary. Oh, and be sure to practice your speech a few times before you give it to the fraternity. You’ll be a lot more relaxed than someone who just wings it, without planning first. Just knowing that you’re prepared will give you confidence. Better yet—you’ll come across to your audience as super prepared, too.”

“That makes a lot of sense, Karyn.”

“Good, glad I could help. Now I’ve got to run or I’ll be late for my next class. Good luck!”

“Wait! Now I need you to help me decide what to say! Karyn, come back! What am I going to wear? Call me! . . . ”
Introduction

As you might expect from the scenario you just read, one objective of this chapter is to discuss the issue of speech anxiety. We’ll discuss how speech anxiety might be manifested in your presentations and how normal your anxiety is in relation to other speakers. You’ll also hear some tips for reducing your speech apprehension.

In this chapter, we will also focus on the origins of public speaking and trace how it has evolved from ancient Greece to the twenty-first century. You might be surprised to learn how relevant public speaking remains despite its ancient beginnings. We’ll look at how speech continues to impact all areas of everyday life, from career and political ambitions to your social life.

Finally, we’ll outline the components that comprise the speech communication process and identify some of the first basic terms you’ll read about as you begin the journey to becoming a better public speaker. As you start to understand and use the terms and concepts common to public speaking, you’ll soon find that you too can “speak the language.”

Learning Objectives

After you complete this chapter, you should be able to

- Identify the elements within the speech communication process
- Explain the value of a course in public speaking
- Discuss the origins of public speaking
- Analyze your personal level of speech anxiety as compared to the average learner
- Discuss suggested tips for overcoming speech anxiety
- Identify the terms and concepts from the chapter

Key Terms

**Rhetoric:** effective public speaking

**Three forms of Interference**

**Mental:** occurs when the listener is not fully focused on what s/he is hearing due to s/he own thoughts.

**Physical:** noise that detracts from the delivered message

**Physiological:** occurs when the body is responsible for the blocked signals.
**Feedback:** occurs when listeners in the audience are sending a message of their own.

**Speaker:** the person who is delivering or presenting the speech.

**Listener(s):** the person or person(s) who have assembled to hear the oral message.

**Message:** the subject the speaker is discussing or the ideas the s/he is presenting that covers a particular topic.

**Channel:** the means by which the message is sent or transmitted.

**Context:** the physical location of your speech.

**Speech Anxiety:** the nervousness that a speaker feels before and/or during a presentation.

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**Can Effective Speaking Make a Difference?**

**Greek Rhetoric**

You might be surprised to learn that public speaking has been considered a critical skill for thousands of years. Much of our current theory on oral communication derives from early Greek and Roman scholars, such as Aristotle and Cicero, who felt effective public speaking, or rhetoric, was one of the most valuable skills they could demonstrate within their society. Rhetoric topped the list of required areas of study for young Greek students. A famous quote attributed to Isocrates, the founder of the first school of rhetoric in Athens, says, “But I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well….” To the Greeks, the ability to communicate effectively orally was the mark of a well-educated citizen (Isocrates); it was one of the requirements for participation within the democracy. Citizens often gathered in the marketplace simply to participate in the process of argument and debate. In fact, the word forum, used today to indicate an online place for discussion, was originally known as an open area within Greek and Roman cities often utilized for public speaking.

**Everyday Examples of Public Speaking**

We’ve continued the use of that ancient word, forum, in our cultural language, but just how important is speech in today’s society? You might think that public speaking skills are outdated and no longer relevant. Surely people in our present-day societies don’t gather to listen to the rhetoric of argument and debate. You might even think that speaking well is no longer a criterion for success. Then how do you explain the American judicial system? Public speech is an inherent component in that process. Two adversarial lawyers arguing points of law before a jury is an example of public speaking at its best. Citizens are asked to determine guilt or innocence based on the effectiveness of the speakers and their arguments. In fact, people make important decisions every day based on a speaker’s skill in communicating.

Think about our political process. In democratic societies around the world, citizens gather to hear political candidates debate the pertinent issues. Often the choices people make about who should be elected are based, in large part, on the candidate’s ability to speak fluently and
eloquently in public. Consider political protests and rallies. Aren’t these concerned citizens are much like the early Greeks and Romans gathering in a public place in order to exercise their right to public speech? The American people considered freedom of speech so important that it became a founding principle in the creation of their democracy.

**ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE: #1 EMPLOYER-Sought Skill**

But you might argue that public speaking skills are critical only in isolated areas of our daily lives. Do you think to yourself that you’ll never really use speech in your day-to-day life? Or that no one is concerned with your ability to speak in a public forum? Then you would be wrong. Take a look at the list in the following table. While employers would ideally like to hire employees with all these skills, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (“Class of 2008”), employers consistently rank communication as one of the top ten skills they seek. In fact, communication tops the list. Facilitating a training session, speaking to a work team, or reporting to your boss are all typical work-related examples of public speaking. Wouldn’t you want to be seen as an effective speaker in each of those scenarios?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Ten Qualities/Skills Employers Want</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong work ethic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork skills (works well with others)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility/adaptability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
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Source - National Association of College and Employers, 2008

**Speech and My Personal Life?**

Finally, what about your personal life? Can you imagine a situation where your skill as a speaker might impact your social and private life? What if you had to speak to a zoning committee before you could convert a warehouse into the perfect loft for yourself? Knowing how to research and organize your ideas so that you sound knowledgeable and informed is just one of the skills you’ll learn as a public speaker. Or perhaps you are a finalist for a fantastic job—your dream job. The only hitch? Your final interview is in front of a panel of interviewers. As a practiced public speaker you'll find yourself answering each question clearly and calmly.
Or maybe you meet the perfect girl (or guy) at a party and you’re dying to ask her/him out on a date. Can you do that in front of all of her/his friends? Whew! Talk about pressure! But you’ll know how to manage any signs of anxiety so that you appear confident, cool, and collected. Public speaking can help you feel at ease in all of these situations, whether your audience is one or many.

In fact, a study in 2004 found that short-term stresses—such as speaking in public—are actually thought to boost your immune system. The researchers found that these types of tasks “tended to mobilize (the subjects’) fast-acting Immune response—the body’s all-purpose defense system for fending off infection and healing wounds” (Song 1). It’s a small stress that teaches your body to handle the bigger stressors of life. So speaking in public is good for you in many ways.

**Effective Public Speaking Activity**

**Directions:** In the space below, give two examples of how effective public communication would benefit you in your private or public life.

**Example #1:**

**Example #2:**

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**The Speech Communication Process**

There are a number of models used to demonstrate the process of public speaking. Many researchers have worked to create a visual image or representation of the communication process so that you can more easily understand the different components and how they work together. The terms used by different authors, texts, and models vary slightly as well, but don’t let that worry you. In this chapter you’ll quickly see that even though the terms and models may vary slightly, the process of communicating is universal. Most who study the speech communication process agree that there are several critical components present in nearly every speech. We have chosen in this text to label these components using the following terms:

*The speaker* is the one delivering or presenting the speech and *the listener* are the person(s) assembled to hear the message.
Chapter 1: The Speech Communication Process

- Speaker
- Listener(s)
- Message
- Channel
- Context
- Interference
- Feedback
- Speaker

As you might imagine, the speaker is the crucial first element within the speech communication process. Without a speaker, there is no process. **The speaker is simply the person who is delivering, or presenting, the speech.** A speaker might be someone who is training employees in your workplace. Your professor is another example of a public speaker as s/he gives a lecture. Even a stand-up comedian can be considered a public speaker. After all, each of these people is presenting an oral message to an audience in a public setting. Most speakers, however, would agree that the listener is one of the primary reasons that they speak.

**Listener**

The listener is just as important as the speaker; neither one is effective without the other. **The listener is the person or persons who have assembled to hear the oral message.** Some texts might even call several listeners an “audience.” The listener generally forms an opinion as to the effectiveness of the speaker and the validity of the speaker’s message based on what they see and hear during the presentation. The listener’s job sometimes includes critiquing, or evaluating, the speaker’s style and message. You might be asked to critique your classmates as they speak or to complete an evaluation of a public speaker in another setting. That makes the job of the listener extremely important. Providing constructive feedback to speakers often helps the speaker improve her/his speech tremendously.

**Message**

Another crucial element in the speech process is the message. **The message is what the speaker is discussing or the ideas that s/he is presenting to you as s/he covers a particular topic.** The important chapter concepts presented by your professor become the message during a lecture. The commands and steps you need to use the new software at work are the message of the trainer as s/he presents the information to your department. The message might be lengthy, such as the President’s State of the Union address, or fairly brief, as in a five-minute presentation given in class.

**Channel**

**The channel is the means by which the message is sent or transmitted.** Different channels are used to deliver the message, depending on the communication type or context. For instance, in mass communication, the channel utilized might be a television or radio broadcast. The use of a cell phone is an example of a channel that you might use to send a friend a message in interpersonal communication. However, the channel typically used within public speaking is the speaker’s voice, or more specifically, the sound waves used to carry the voice to those listening. You could watch a prerecorded speech or one accessible on YouTube, and you might now say the channel is the television or your computer. This is partially true. However, the speech would still have no value if the speaker’s voice was not present, so in reality, the channel is now a combination of the two—the speaker’s voice broadcast through an electronic source.
CONTEXT

The context is a bit more complicated than the other elements we have discussed so far. The context is more than one specific component. For example, when you give a speech in your classroom, the classroom, or the physical location of your speech, is part of the context. That’s probably the easiest part of context to grasp.

But you should also consider that the people in your audience expect you to behave in a certain manner, depending on the physical location or the occasion of the presentation. If you gave a toast at a wedding, the audience wouldn’t be surprised if you told a funny story about the couple or used informal gestures such as a high-five or a slap on the groom’s back. That would be acceptable within the expectations of your audience, given the occasion. However, what if the reason for your speech was the presentation of a eulogy at a loved one’s funeral? Would the audience still find a high-five or humor as acceptable in that setting? Probably not. So the expectations of your audience must be factored into context as well.

The cultural rules—often unwritten and sometimes never formally communicated to us—are also a part of the context. Depending on your culture, you would probably agree that there are some “rules” typically adhered to by those attending a funeral. In some cultures, mourners wear dark colors and are somber and quiet. In other cultures, grieving out loud or beating one’s chest to show extreme grief is traditional. Therefore, the rules from our culture—no matter what they are—play a part in the context as well.

INTERFERENCE

Every speaker hopes that her/his speech is clearly understood by the audience. However, there are times when some obstacle gets in the way of the message and interferes with the listener’s ability to hear what’s being said. This is interference, or you might have heard it referred to as “noise.” Every speaker must prepare and present with the assumption that interference is likely to be present in the speaking environment.

Interference can be mental, physical, or physiological. Mental interference occurs when the listener is not fully focused on what s/he is hearing due to her/his own thoughts. If you’ve ever caught yourself daydreaming in class during a lecture, you’re experiencing mental interference. Your own thoughts are getting in the way of the message.

A second form of interference is physical interference. This is noise in the literal sense—someone coughing behind you during a speech or the sound of a mower outside the classroom window. You may be unable to hear the speaker because of the surrounding environmental noises.
The last form of interference is physiological. This type of interference occurs when your body is responsible for the blocked signals. A deaf person, for example, has the truest form of physiological interference; s/he may have varying degrees of difficulty hearing the message. If you've ever been in a room that was too cold or too hot and found yourself not paying attention, you're experiencing physiological interference. Your bodily discomfort distracts from what is happening around you.

**Feedback**

The final component within the speech process is feedback. While some might assume that the speaker is the only one who sends a message during a speech, the reality is that the listeners in the audience are sending a message of their own, called feedback. Often this is how the speaker knows if s/he is sending an effective message. Occasionally the feedback from listeners comes in verbal form—questions from the audience or an angry response from a listener about a key point presented. However, in general, feedback during a presentation is typically non-verbal—a student nodding her/his head in agreement or a confused look from an audience member. An observant speaker will scan the audience for these forms of feedback, but keep in mind that non-verbal feedback is often more difficult to spot and to decipher. For example, is a yawn a sign of boredom, or is it simply a tired audience member?

Generally, all of the above elements are present during a speech. However, you might wonder what the process would look like if we used a diagram to illustrate it. Initially, some students think of public speaking as a linear process—the speaker sending a message to the listener—a simple, straight line. But if you'll think about the components we've just covered, you begin to see that a straight line cannot adequately represent the process, when we add listener feedback into the process. The listener is sending her/his own message back to the speaker, so perhaps the process might better be represented as circular. Add in some interference and place the example in context, and you have a more complete idea of the speech process.

**Speech Communication Model Activity**

**Directions:** Draw your own speech communication model below. Be sure to include and label the seven essential components discussed in this chapter.

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**Speech Anxiety**

**What Is It?**

Speech anxiety is best defined as the nervousness that a speaker feels before and/or during a presentation. Sweating palms, a shaky voice, a dry throat, difficulty breathing, and even memory loss are all common symptoms of anxiety. The symptoms you, as an individual, will feel are hard to predict. But it helps if you remember that nearly every speaker has experienced some degree of speech anxiety. Even professional speakers occasionally feel a small amount of apprehension at times. Anxiety levels vary. Some speakers will report little to no anxiety.
while speaking; others will confess that they are petrified at the thought of speaking in public. Jerry Seinfeld used to joke that “at a funeral, the average person would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy.” Now that is fear!

**How Do I Overcome My Fear?**

There are many reasons why a speaker might feel anxious, but there are several steps you can take to reduce your anxiety. First, remember that everyone has experienced some level of anxiety during a presentation. Knowing that you are not the only one feeling nervous should help a bit. Keep in mind that most listeners won’t even be aware of your anxiety. They often don’t see what you thought was glaringly obvious; they’re busy preparing themselves for their turn up front. It is perfectly normal to feel nervous when you find yourself in an unfamiliar setting or situation. You probably felt nervous the first time you had to shoot a foul shot in front of a large crowd of basketball fans. Or you might recall the anxiety you felt during your first piano recital as a child, or that first job interview. Think of this nervous feeling as your body readying itself for an important activity.

Also, you might feel anxious if you have not adequately prepared for the presentation. Preparing and practicing your presentation are two of the surest ways to minimize nervousness. No one wants to feel embarrassed in public, but knowing that you have done everything possible to ensure success should help you feel more confident. Do your research and organize your ideas logically. Then practice several times. Try to find someone to listen as you practice—your family, your friends, your roommate—and listen to their feedback. Even if they don’t know your topic, they know you. They may even be able to point out some areas in your presentation that still need improvement. The more you prepare and practice, the more successful your presentation will likely be.

Finally, be optimistic and focus on the positives. Use positive self-talk as you prepare. Don’t tell yourself that you’ll perform horribly or that you can’t do it. Have you ever heard of a self-fulfilling prophecy? What you expect to happen may be exactly what does happen. So tell yourself that you’re well prepared and that you will improve every time you speak. Remind yourself that you are calm and in control of the situation and be sure to take a deep breath whenever necessary. Imagine yourself speaking clearly and effortlessly. Find a couple of friendly faces in the crowd and focus on them. If they’re sending positive energy your way, grab it!

**How Nervous Am I?**

New speakers often overestimate the amount of anxiety they feel or expect to feel when speaking in public. The self-assessment below is an easy way to determine where your level of anxiety places you when measured against the level reported by others. You may be surprised to find that this assessment indicates that you are less anxious than you might have originally anticipated.

*Directions:* Below are thirty-four statements that people sometimes make about themselves. Although some of the questions may seem repetitive, answer quickly and go with your first instinct. There is no right or wrong answer. If you’ve not yet given a speech, think about how you’ve felt any time you needed to speak in public—asking questions in a full lecture hall, giving a presentation in class, or perhaps speaking before your coworkers in a meeting.

Please indicate whether you believe each statement applies to you by marking:

Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5.

___ 1. While preparing for giving a speech, I feel tense and nervous.
___ 2. I feel tense when I see the words “speech” and “public speech” on a course outline when studying.
___ 3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
___ 4. Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.
___ 5. I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.
___ 6. I have no fear of giving a speech.
___ 7. Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.
___ 8. I look forward to giving a speech.
___ 9. When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.
___ 10. My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.
___ 11. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
___ 12. I enjoy preparing for a speech.
___ 13. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.
___ 14. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don’t know.
___ 15. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
___ 16. I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.
___ 17. My mind is clear when giving a speech.
___ 18. I do not dread giving a speech.
___ 19. I perspire just before starting a speech.
___ 20. My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.
21. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.
22. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
23. Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.
24. While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.
25. I breathe faster just before starting a speech.
26. I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.
27. I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.
28. I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.
29. When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.
30. During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.
31. I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.
32. My heart beats very fast while I present a speech.
33. I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.
34. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring: To determine your score on the PRPSA, complete the following steps:

1. Add scores for items 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34.
2. Add the scores for items 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, and 26.
3. Complete the following formula: PRPSA = 72 - Total from Step 2 + Total from Step 1.
   Your score should be between 34 and 170.

Anxiety Scale:

High anxiety = > 131  Moderate anxiety = 98-131  Low anxiety = < 98

Hopefully, any fear that you’re anticipating as you prepare to speak has been minimized. Just knowing that you are not alone should be comforting; it is a rare individual who doesn’t feel at least a bit of speech apprehension. If you haven’t already, take the self-assessment above. Your score will help you better define your initial level of anxiety. Then keep in mind that the more you practice a new skill, the more confident you will become.

The speech communication process involves many components, but it’s really not that complicated. There are certainly quite a few new terms and concepts, but learning these is your initiation into a brand new world; you’re joining thousands of others who have also taken these first steps to becoming better public speakers. Now that you know some of the basic vocabulary, you share a language common to all public speakers.

